

VZCZCXRO5537
RR RUEHPW
DE RUEHBUL #3294/01 3631233
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 281233Z DEC 08
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 6544
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 003294

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/FO, SCA/A, EUR/RPM
STATE PASS TO AID FOR ASIA/SCAA
NSC FOR WOOD
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CENTCOM FOR CG CSTC-A, CG CJTF-101 POLAD

SENSITIVE
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E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: URUZGAN PREPARES FOR A SUCCESSFUL VOTER REGISTRATION
CAMPAIGN

11. (SBU) Summary: With less than one month until the January 20 kick-off of the Phase IV voter registration period, Uruzgan election and ANSF officials are making steady progress in planning for a campaign that could lead to at least 100,000 new voters. The veteran Provincial Elections Officer has already identified most of his staff for the 11 voter registration centers and 52 sub-stations, ensured that there would be at least 12 female sub-stations in the province, and launched an ambitious public awareness campaign. Serious logistical and security challenges remain -- e.g., transportation of IEC equipment and personnel to remote and unstable districts, an expected surge in IED attacks, and an uninterested and absent governor -- but ISAF and CF are working closely with the Afghan officials to address these obstacles. End Summary.

Logistical Preparations: So Far, So Good

12. (SBU) In a December 14 meeting with PRT and PRTOff, IEC Provincial Election Officer (PEO) Obaidullah Osmani provided a detailed update on the logistical preparations for the Phase IV voter registration (VR) campaign in Uruzgan, which was recently postponed until January 20. Osmani, an Uruzgan native and former District Field Coordinator (DFC) during the 2004/2005 general elections, demonstrated an in-depth knowledge of the province's political and tribal challenges, the administrative steps in the VR process, and his responsibilities and those of his subordinates.

13. (SBU) Below is a brief overview of the VR process in Uruzgan:

-- There will be 11 voter registration centers (VRCs) and 52 sub-stations: four VRCs and 21 sub-stations in provincial capital Tarin Kowt; two VRCs and nine substations in Deh Rawood; one VRC and five sub-stations in Chora; two VRCs and nine sub-stations in Khas Uruzgan; one VRC and four sub-stations in Char Chineh; and, one VRC and four sub-stations in (unofficial) Chenartu district. Osmani requested CF air support to transport Independent Election Commission (IEC) personnel and materials to the more remote and unstable Khas Uruzgan, Char Chineh, and Chenartu districts, but Osmani agreed that ANSF should be his first point of contact; CF would fill in the gaps.

-- The VRCs and sub-stations are located in the most populated areas to minimize security risks. For security reasons, sub-stations were not set up in the heavily concentrated Ghilzai Pashtun areas outside the district centers of Tarin Kowt and Chora, given that those towns remain largely under Taliban influence. These voters will have to travel up to three hours, walking to Tarin Kowt and Chora centers to register. Osmani commented that, "unfortunately, 50% of the population in the Ghilzai areas wants to register and the other 50% wants to kill the people who register."

-- There will be a minimum of 12 sub-stations designated for women,

with at least one female sub-station located in each district, with the possible exception of Chenartu. The lack of literate women in Uruzgan poses a problem. Osmani has already hired 10 literate women to fulfill clerical duties at the female sub-stations, and, if necessary, would try to put one literate female IEC supervising official in each female sub-station. Additional literate women are still needed to staff the remaining designated sub-stations for women. If he comes up short, Osmani would have to reduce the number of female sub-stations.

-- DFCs and most of the IEC personnel have been hired for all districts, except Char Chineh. Osmani pointed out that he has received several applications for the DFC slot in Char Chineh and other positions, but he seeks only "the most qualified staff."

Expected Turnout and Public Awareness Campaign

14. (SBU) Osmani estimated that approximately 140,000 Uruzgan residents should have their VR cards from the previous election. Kabul IEC staff recommended that he should be ready to receive roughly 102,000 VR applications in January; however, Osmani believes the turnout will be higher. The Australian Reconstruction Task Force in Uruzgan conducted a survey of voting-age residents of Khas Uruzgan in 2007, and found that 50,000 residents planned to register for the 2009 election. If Khas Uruzgan district, one of the province's medium-sized districts, reaches 50,000 new registrations, the number of registrations from other districts alone could exceed 102,000.

15. (SBU) Osmani, determined to surpass the 102,000 benchmark, will launch an aggressive public awareness campaign. In addition to the

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nationally broadcast television, radio, and SMS text messages, which began on December 15, teams of one man and one woman will be dispatched to residential and commercial areas around the VRCs and sub-stations to directly engage Uruzgan residents on their civic duty to participate in the democratic process and register (if necessary) for the upcoming elections. The teams will visit mosques, clinics, businesses, shuras, and private residences.

Key Challenges

16. (SBU) Security, Security, Security. The PEO, ANSF provincial commanders, ISAF, and CF remain concerned that local insurgents will generate more night letters and lay more IEDs along the routes to VRCs and sub-stations. Although ISAF and CF have recently conducted several small-scale clearing operations in Taliban-controlled areas in preparation for the VR, ANSF (mostly ANP) continue to suffer from a surge in IED attacks. Task Force Uruzgan (TFU), USSF, U.S. PMTs, and PRTOff have urged the ANSF at the provincial and district levels to develop joint security plans, and the first such meeting occurred on December 20. Provincial Chief of Police Jumma Ghul added that he would rely on the recent graduates of the ANP Focused District Development (FDD) training program to serve as VRC security and road checkpoint commanders in Tarin Kowt and Deh Rawood. Ghul is eager to put his trained personnel to use.

17. (SBU) Absent Governor. Governor Hamdam has done little to support or coordinate the work of the IEC and ANSF officials or raise local interest in the VR campaign. Hamdam, who is on vacation from December 5 until approximately January 19, left the formidable task to a weak deputy governor and the TFU. The deputy governor wants a successful VR campaign and, despite his limited influence in the province, has cultivated solid ties with the PEO and ANSF provincial commanders. The TFU and ANSF commanders will coordinate with the deputy governor to address the logistical and security hurdles at the district level in a timely manner.

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